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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL ELECTION RESULTS COMING DECEMBER 23

REFTEL: ANTANANARIVO 1389 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) Madagascar's High Constitutional Court (HCC) has invited the diplomatic community, journalists and opposition candidates to the strategically-timed announcement of the official presidential election results December 23. Opposition candidates have filed nearly 25 procedural complaints at the HCC to date, contesting defects in the electronic voter registration lists, the misuse of public staff and vehicles, and other alleged irregularities. Breaking two weeks of silence, fourth place presidential candidate Herizo Razafimahaleo submitted a request to the HCC calling for the organization of a new presidential election. In a press conference December 20, he used statistically-questionable calculations to criticize errors in the total voter population, the candidates' access to public media coverage, the collection and publication of the election results, and the nationwide coverage of the President's privately owned MBS radio and television stations. (Note: Razafimahaleo's complaints regarding equal access to public media are without merit. A USG-financed media observation analysis showed that state media fulfilled its obligation to provide equal and free airtime to presidential candidates, of which 12 of the 14 candidates took advantage. In addition, Razafimahaleo was second only to President Ravalomanana in buying airtime on private and public media stations. End Note.)

¶2. (U) After a series of house searches and arrests, the Government of Madagascar (GOM) is rapidly tying up loose ends in renegade General Fidy's botched coup attempt (refTel), arresting his accomplice Colonel Welson Ralaikoa December 20. Only presidential candidate and former Mayor of Fianarantsoa, Pety Rakotoniana, a Fidy sympathizer charged with unrelated crimes, is still at large. General Fidy is being transferred to Tsiafahy maximum security prison -- home to a number of prisoners Fidy had arrested for acts of violence during the 2002 crisis when he helped Ravalomanana restore order.

¶3. (SBU) International donors agreed at a recent meeting there was a clear winner (Ravalomanana) in Madagascar's generally free and fair elections. However, many voiced concerns about the number of procedural complaints filed at the HCC and the lack of complete transparency throughout the election process. Donors identified four main areas of advocacy for electoral reform in the months ahead. On the technical side, the EU will continue to correct the electronic voter registration list through April 2007 and compile an inventory of leftover election material in preparation for the upcoming rounds of senatorial and gubernatorial elections. (Note: The date of these two elections is still unknown. However, National Assembly elections are anticipated for late 2007. End Note.) On the political side, donors will work to raise the political will among GOM officials and legislators to adopt a single ballot and an

independent national electoral commission. Some donors also expressed interest in lobbying for laws regulating political parties and campaign financing.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: By choosing to announce the official election results December 23, the GOM is banking on the hope that the public's focus on holiday festivities will undermine the efforts of any would-be political troublemakers. Despite the proliferation of procedural complaints, Post remains skeptical they will gain traction at the HCC because the claims broadly dismiss the entire electoral process rather than presenting specific or well-researched complaints. END COMMENT.

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